

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 12, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Haaland,

Thank you for your leadership in managing America's national forests and public lands for the benefit of our climate, watersheds, wildlife, and communities. As you work to implement Executive Order 14072, we respectfully request that the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) formalize regulations that protect mature and old-growth stands and trees, with the goal of returning old-growth to historic levels throughout federal lands. Furthermore, as USDA and DOI work to define, identify, and inventory mature and old-growth forests, we ask that you issue interim guidance as soon as possible to protect against the further loss of existing mature and old-growth forests.

One of the simplest and most cost-effective approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation is to ensure that federal forests are protected and managed in a way that increases the overall acreage of mature and old-growth forests. Mature and old-growth trees play an outsized role in carbon sequestration and storage and provide a host of related benefits, including water quality, recreation, and overall ecosystem integrity. However, mature and old-growth trees on federal lands face a myriad of growing threats, including uncharacteristic wildfires, climate change and, in some cases, portions of projects where there is ecologically inappropriate logging of mature and old-growth trees.

President Biden's Executive Order (E.O.) 14072, *Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies*, recognizes the critical services provided by mature and old-growth forests and directs USDA and DOI to define, identify, and complete an inventory of mature and old-growth forests on federal lands by April 22, 2023. Following the completion of this inventory, E.O. 14072 directs USDA and DOI to analyze threats to mature and old-growth forests and develop policies to institutionalize climate-smart management and conservation strategies that address these threats.

We recognize that your agencies are working hard to implement E.O. 14072 and meet the April 22 deadline, and these efforts to define, identify, and inventory mature and old-growth forests will undoubtedly provide useful data for years to come. In the meantime, however, we should also take immediate action to protect existing mature and old-growth forests from further loss.

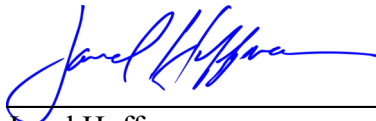
We strongly urge you to initiate a formal rulemaking to ensure these crucial actions are not easily overturned in the future. While the rulemaking process is underway, we again urge you to issue interim guidance to protect against further loss of these forests and trees and the critical services they provide.

Protecting mature and old-growth forests and returning old-growth forests to pre-industrial levels are essential to protect our climate, safeguard biodiversity, maintain our water supply, and provide the kind of recreation opportunities that have long been central to the American experience. In order to achieve the aims of E.O. 14072, we respectfully urge USDA and DOI to formalize regulations that protect mature and old-growth stands and trees, with the goal of returning old-growth to historic levels throughout federal lands. And while your agencies work to implement E.O. 14072 and finalize the rulemaking process, we ask that you issue interim guidance as soon as possible to protect against the further loss of existing mature and old-growth forests. These actions are key to accomplishing the Administration's commitments to protecting our climate and biodiversity and to position the U.S. as an international leader in nature-based solutions.

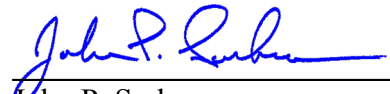
Sincerely,



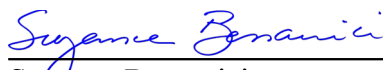
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress




Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Emanuel Cleaver, II
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Jamie Raskin
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Mike Levin
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



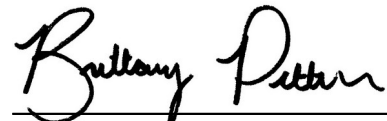
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Katie Porter
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Brittany Pettersen
Member of Congress



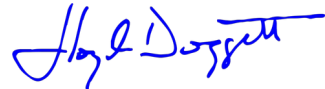
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



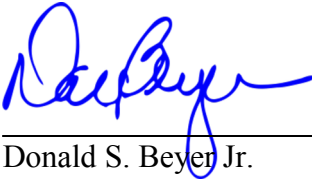
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



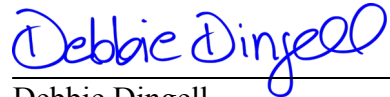
Summer Lee
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jim Tokuda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jim Tokuda

Member of Congress